

*The editio princeps of Luigi Pirandello's translation
of Goethe's Roman Elegies (Giusti, 1896): Pirandello
and Ugo Fleres 'translators' and friends*
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The *editio princeps* of Luigi Pirandello's translation of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* (Livorno, Giusti, 1896), the only edition published in Pirandello's lifetime, can be placed in the context of the spread of «classicismo naturalistico»¹ in Italy. It marks a turning point in the popularity of the anthology in Roman literary circles, as testified by the reviews of contemporary critics.² The work was close to Pirandello's heart and stems from a moment in his life when he saw himself as a poet, as is known from a famous autobiographical note.³ The care and commitment that Pirandello dedicated

¹ Emma Pistelli Rinaldi, *Le Elegie Romane di Goethe e le loro fonti classiche*, Genova, Edizioni Sabatelli, 1985, p. 102.

² Marta Fumi, «*Senza l'amore non saria mondo il mondo*». Nuova edizione delle *Elegie romane di Goethe nella traduzione di Luigi Pirandello, con testo tedesco a fronte e commento*, Milano, EDUCatt, 2017, pp. 38-40.

³ Luigi Pirandello, *Lettera autobiografica*, in *Saggi, Poesie, Scritti vari*, ed. by Manlio Lo Vecchio-Musti, 4th ed., Milano, Mondadori, 1977, p. 1286.

to this translation, as recent studies have proven, ensure that it has its rightful place alongside the poetic works of his youth; it also demonstrates his strong connection with Goethe, an author that Pirandello appreciated throughout his life: leafing through the surviving titles in the catalogue of his private library⁴ we can see that he bought books about Goethe and his works well into old age.

The vicissitudes of getting the Roman Elegies published

Pirandello was determined to get his translation published and it eventually came out, published by Giusti, in the early months of 1896 (or, as I shall show below, at the end of 1895), after a fraught and frustrating publishing experience that was to last almost five years and initially involved two other publishers, namely Loescher and Malcotti. The period between 1891 and 1896 was a productive one for Pirandello: in a letter dated February 1893 he listed no fewer than 21 titles of short stories, novels, plays and books of poetry that he had completed or was working on.⁵ His translation of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* was finally published towards the end of this highly creative period, after years of delays and two unsuccessful attempts at publishing.

Pirandello's letters to his family testify to just how agonizing this prolonged and troubled publishing process turned out to be. According to Elio Providenti, the first mention of the translation of Goethe's collection was made in an undated letter which he includes among those written in 1891. This is because it contains a reference to a trip to Geneva, which we effectively know about since it was mentioned first in a letter to his «carissimi» of November 1891,⁶ and later in the undated letter, again to his *dear ones*. In this letter Pirandello writes:

⁴ *La Biblioteca di Luigi Pirandello. Catalogo alfabetico per autore*, ed. by Dina Saponaro, Lucia Torsello, Alessandro D'Amico, http://www.studiodiluigipirandello.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/biblioteca_pirandello.pdf.

⁵ Luigi Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione 1891-1898: con appendice di lettere sparse 1899-1919*, introduction and notes by Elio Providenti, Roma, Bulzoni, 1996, pp. 132-133.

⁶ Ivi, p. 86.

Non scrivo a lungo perché ho ancora da tradurre l'ultima delle 20 *Elegie Romane* del Goethe, e l'Editore, il Loescher, che pubblicherà questa mia traduzione splendidamente illustrata dal Fleres, aspetta già da tempo.⁷

It was therefore a moment in which the translation was already close to completion. From these lines we learn that Pirandello would have liked to see his translation go to print in 1891, with Loescher. The letter also mentions the contribution of his friend Ugo Fleres, the illustrator of that edition. Two letters from Pirandello to Jenny Schulz-Lander confirm the advanced stage of the translation at that point in time: the first dated 17 October 1891 and the other November 1891, in which Pirandello writes in German that: «Bald werde ich Dir ein Exemplar meiner Goethe's *Röm. Elegien* Übersetzung schicken. Eine Zeitung hat schon von ihr sehr gut geschrieben. Der Herausgeber wird eine wunderschöne illustrierte Auflage machen»⁸ and «Vorgestern habe ich die ersten Probebogen meiner Uebersetzung der *Röm. Elegie* von Goethe bekommen».⁹ Therefore, by November 1891 the finished translation must have been almost ready for printing, at the Loescher publishing house.

It is also interesting to quote the passage of a Pirandello's letter to his father dated November 1891, written from Rome, where he had been living since 19 April 1891, after having completed his studies in Bonn. In it, on the possibility of his becoming secretary of the Rome section of the International Peace Committee, he writes that «Mi metterei insomma nella *possibilità* di sorprendere la dea Occasione (è il Goethe che l'ha deificata)».¹⁰ Behind this reference there is a quotation from the 4th Roman Elegy, which he had already translated and with which he was thus very familiar. The goddess Opportunity is the protagonist of the 4th Elegy and is expressly mentioned in line 17 (both in the German text and in the Italian one):

⁷ Ivi, p. 89.

⁸ Giuseppe Faustini, *Luigi e Jenny: storia di un amore primaverile*, «Nuova Antologia», year 126, July-September 1991, pp. 276-305: 304: «I will shortly send you a copy of my translation of Goethe's *Roman Elegies*. One newspaper has already reviewed it very favourably. The publisher will produce a magnificent illustrated edition».

⁹ *Ibidem*: «The day before yesterday I received the first proofs of my translation of Goethe's *Roman Elegies*».

¹⁰ Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., p. 85.

Diese Göttin, sie heißt Gelegenheit; lernet sie kennen!
Sie erscheint euch oft, immer in andrer Gestalt.

Occasion si noma la diva – a conoscerla tosto
Imparate! – A voi spesso in varia guisa appare.¹¹

Regarding Pirandello's comment on the fact that it was Goethe who had deified the goddess, it is worth remembering, as Manacorda¹² underlines, that a goddess named Occasio is never mentioned by Latin elegists.¹³ The German poet had probably come across it in Benjamin Hederich's *Mythologisches Lexikon* or in Herder's version of the *Antologia palatina* (*Blumen aus der Griechischen Anthologie*), to which he had also contributed. In addition, both Goethe and Pirandello may well have recalled the Greek concept of Καῖρός, which had enjoyed great literary, philosophical and figurative success during the Renaissance and later, with this significant difference: where the ancients had usually imagined Καῖρός as a young boy, in most Renaissance images it was represented «as a young, attractive woman, who must be seized by a ready and virile man».¹⁴ And this is precisely the imagery to which Goethe refers in his 4th elegy.

The passage of the aforementioned letter shows not only that Pirandello was thoroughly familiar with the *Roman Elegies*, which is self-evident since at that moment in time the translation had been completed, but also that he wished to make Goethe's verses his own, to the point of comparing his own experience, with great affinity of feeling, to that of the great German poet.

The road to publishing the collection, however, was to be longer than Pirandello expected. From a letter to his mother we learn that in February 1892 the edition had not yet been published: «Ho in corso di pubblicazione un nuovo volume. È una traduzione delle *Elegie Romane* del Goethe. La pubblica il Loescher illustrata dal Fleres. Traduzione ed illustrazione per trecento

¹¹ Fumi, «*Senza l'amore non saria mondo il mondo*», cit., pp. 64-65.

¹² Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Le Elegie, le Epistole e gli Epigrammi veneziani*, ed. by Guido Manacorda, Firenze, Sansoni, 1921, p. 210.

¹³ For a history of the goddess Καῖρός – Occasio – *Gelegenheit* through the centuries see Horst Rüdiger, *Göttin Gelegenheit. Gestaltwandel einer Allegorie*, «*Arcadia: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*», Band I, 1966, pp. 121-166.

¹⁴ *Grasping KAIROS*, <http://graspingkairos.wixsite.com/network/kairos>.

lire!! centocinquanta a me e centocinquanta al Fleres! Un'irrisione! Ma meglio poco, che nulla».¹⁵ These lines underline how hard it was for Pirandello to be adequately remunerated for the effort he had put into his translation. This publication is also mentioned in another, undated, letter from 1892: «Per altro, il mio nuovo libro di versi *Il labirinto* sarà presto pubblicato, contemporaneamente forse alla mia traduzione dell'*Elegie romane* del Goethe».¹⁶

February 1893 marked an unfortunate turn of events:

Io avevo avuto la fortuna di vendere per trecento lire all'editore Loescher la mia traduzione delle *Elegie Romane* del Goethe illustrata dal Fleres. Sissignore! Muore il Loescher, e sfumano trecento e pubblicazione, come nulla!¹⁷

In the same letter Pirandello gives vent to all his bitterness:

20 lavori, capite? Anzi 21; dimenticavo le *Elegie Romane*, traduzione dal Goethe... Ventuno, dei quali dieci o già finiti o per esser finiti, e tutti gli altri incominciati. Ebbene, lo credereste? Non trovo modo di darne fuori alcuno. È una disperazione; è una condizione di cose che svisisce. Non solo non viene data alcuna mercede al lavoro letterario, ma neppur si trova chi voglia stamparlo *gratis et amore*. Gli autori se la pigliano con gli editori; gli editori se la pigliano col pubblico, che non vuol saperne di letteratura; il pubblico dice: non ho danari né voglia di leggere. Pazzi, i primi; ebrei, i secondi; bestia, il terzo. Come ci si può intendere?¹⁸

A few lines later, we read that there might just be a new opportunity for publishing the *Roman Elegies*:

Adesso sono in via di trattativa (anche per una minor somma) con un altro editore, il Malcotti, di Roma, al quale ho già dato manoscritto e disegni. Staremo a vedere, se si combina. Ma io ormai non ci spero più! A che serve illudersi ancora?¹⁹

¹⁵ Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., p. 94.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 111. The *Il labirinto* collection was planned at length but never completed.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 133.

¹⁸ Ivi, pp. 132-133.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 133.

Pirandello was right not to delude himself: the publication by Malcotti never materialized. A year and a half later, in the letter dated 15 November 1894, the name of yet another publisher popped up:

Io mi son già rimesso al lavoro, e spero di potermi rifare del di più speso nel viaggio disastroso con alcune pubblicazioni, cioè un articolo dato alla *Nuova Antologia*, una novella alla *Tribuna illustrata*, e il manoscritto delle *Elegie romane* del Goethe da me tradotte e illustrate dal Fleres all'editore Giusti di Livorno, il quale pare, dico pare, che abbia accettato di pubblicarle – finalmente, dopo tre anni che mi dormivano sotto la polvere, sullo scrittojo!²⁰

In the end, Giusti was effectively the definitive publisher, but Pirandello was not completely satisfied. On 11 December he wrote to his family as follows: «M'è venuta fallita la pubblicazione delle *Elegie romane* del Goethe da me tradotte. L'editore ha accettato di pubblicarle, ma non mi vuol dare neppure un soldo, dicendo che le spese di stampa ammontano già di per sé sole a una cifra rilevante!». ²¹ This fact was confirmed in the letter to his father dated 22 December, in which Pirandello appears to be resigned:

Io lavoro, al solito, con la stessa lena e con lo stesso amore; ma pure al solito, senza o con pochissimo frutto pecuniario. Me ne son disperato già troppo, e avvilito; adesso apro le braccia alla mia sorte ed esclamo: “Lasciamo fare!”. La condizione dei disgraziati miei colleghi non è, per altro, migliore della mia. Tutt'altro, anzi! E quella di tutti di giorno in giorno volge al peggio, e più andremo, e man mano vieppiù difficile diverrà! Bisognerà aver pazienza! Sarà questa virtù il triste fardello, col quale entreremo nel mondo nuovo, che già ci si schiude. Il Giusti di Livorno ha accettato di pubblicare splendidamente la traduzione illustrata delle *Elegie Romane* del Goethe; ma non ha voluto darmi neppure un bajocco! Che fare? Già da tre anni queste *Elegie* dormivano sul mio scrittojo, e correivano gran pericolo di dormire in eterno il sonno dell'oblio. Così le ho destate, anche col sacrificio del nessun compenso.²²

Having accepted the compromise, not without a certain bitterness, the contract with Giusti of Livorno is approved.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 209.

²¹ Ivi, p. 212.

²² Ivi, p. 213.

In April 1895 the publication seems imminent: «Ho ricevuto le bozze di stampa della traduzione delle *Elegie romane* tradotte dal Goethe: il libro si pubblicherà, pare, tra breve – ve ne spedirò una copia puntualmente».²³ The publication, however, is deferred yet again, midst hopes and disappointments. As testified by the letters dated 2 June: «Intanto il Giusti di Livorno appresta le *Elegie Romane* del Goethe da me tradotte e illustrate dal Fleres. Vi manderò anche queste, appena uscite alla luce»;²⁴ 10 November: «In questo mese usciranno pure alla fine le *Elegie romane* del Goethe da me tradotte e illustrate dal Fleres»²⁵ and, lastly, 20 December 1895:

Entro il mese di dicembre usciranno alfine le *Elegie romane* del Goethe tradotte da me, illustrate dal Fleres, pubblicate dal Giusti di Livorno in edizione veramente splendida. Ve ne manderò subito una copia. Lo stesso editore, se queste *Elegie* avranno buon esito mi pubblicherà pure il *Belfagor*.²⁶

It seems that an important factor in Giusti's decision to publish the translation was a favourable opinion from Giovanni Pascoli, who therefore played a key role in promoting and supporting the publication.²⁷ Significantly, this fact was never mentioned in Pirandello's letters to his family. Pascoli himself was later to regret his recommendation, since he did not like the opinion expressed by Pirandello (under the pseudonym of Giulian Dorpelli) in his partially highly critical review of his fourth edition of the *Myricae* (printed by Giusti), in «La rassegna settimanale universale» dated 14 March 1897, giving rise to 'a dispute and a critical oxymoron'.²⁸ That is how Pascoli gave vent to his feelings, in a letter to his friend Angiolo Orvieto dated 26 March 1897, after having defined Pirandello's article

²³ Ivi, p. 243.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 247.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 277.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 286.

²⁷ Alfredo Barbina, *La Biblioteca di Luigi Pirandello*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1980, p. 26; Elio Providenti, *Gli anni della formazione*, in Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., pp. 17-18; but especially Alfredo Barbina, *Sul primo Pirandello recensore e recensito*, in *Pirandello negli anni sessanta*, Roma, Canicci, 1973, pp. 121-150: 121-122, 140-143 and Giovanni Macchia, *Pirandello (mascherato) contro Pascoli*, «Corriere della Sera», 17 August 1980, p. 7.

²⁸ With this expression I go back to the title of the article that investigates the theme: Graziella Corsinovi, *Pascoli e Pirandello. Storia di una polemica e di un ossimoro critico*, «Italianistica. Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 12, n. 2-3, May-December 1983, pp. 277-291.

«osceno e stupido»: «A quel *Pimpirindello* feci stampare io le *Elegie romane*, perché a me ne fu chiesto giudizio dal Giusti. E io lo diedi favorevole perché era giovane».²⁹ In actual fact, the first stinging part of Pirandello's critique was followed by a second, more positive and admiring review.³⁰

The edition of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* published by Giusti gives the date of publication on the jacket as 1896. In Raffaello Giusti's *Catalogo delle opere di propria edizione o possedute in numero*, dated 1906, the month of publication is unfortunately not given. But we can establish that it had effectively been published by 25 March 1896, since we know that on that date Pirandello sent a copy of the book to professor Wendelin Foerster, Romance philologist in Bonn, with a dedication:

All'illustrissimo Prof. Dr. Wendelin Foerster, con gratissimo e riverente affetto. Roma, 25 marzo '96. Luigi Pirandello.³¹

It is reasonable to suppose that the Giusti publication, which gives the date on the jacket and on the front page as 1896, came out between the end of 1895³² and 25 March 1896. We cannot exclude that the publication may have been ready at the end of 1895, and that the publisher, for business reasons, may have wished to date it 1896. However, we need to be cautious: around 20 December, Pirandello has still not made any mention of the publication having gone through. It is also reasonable to suppose that having originally been planned for the end of the year, it had probably been deferred, and not for the first time.

Dating the translation

As regards the time when the translation was written, it now seems certain that it was not *entirely* completed in Bonn. The first definite indication that Pirandello was working on it goes back to 1891, as demonstrated also

²⁹ Letter to Angiolo Orvieto dated 26 March 1897, in Giovanni Pascoli, *Lettere inedite ad Angiolo Orvieto*, «Il Ponte», year XI, n. 11, November 1955, pp. 1874-1903: 1880-1881.

³⁰ The whole review can be read in Corsinovi, *Pascoli e Pirandello*, cit., pp. 289-291.

³¹ Giuseppe Faustini, *Ancora su Pirandello a Bonn e il suo rapporto col mondo culturale*, «Scena illustrata», n. 7, July 1988, pp. 9-14: 12.

³² See the letter dated 20 December 1895 [Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., p. 286], in which Pirandello declares that the edition will see the light by the end of December.

by passages from his aforementioned letters to Jenny. In particular, in the letter to Jenny dated 14 August 1891 Pirandello wrote that:

In diesen Monaten habe auch ich vom Deutsche im italienische die *Römische Elegien* von Goethe übertragen, und bald wird die Uebersetzung herausgegeben werden.³³

Chronologically speaking, what exactly does he mean by the expression «In diesen Monaten», 'Over the last few months'? At the time when this letter was written (14 August 1891) Pirandello had already been in Rome for several months (since 19 April). If, on the one hand, we cannot completely exclude that the translation could have been started in Bonn, on the other it seems undeniable that it must at least have been completed in the months that followed his return to Rome, as is testified by other data too.³⁴

Apart from Pirandello's biographical note: «Tornato a Roma, tradussi in distici italiani le *Elegie romane* del Goethe»,³⁵ we should also consider what emerges from the introductory sonnet to the collection, dedicated to his friend Ugo Fleres, and from Fleres' own article *Ricordi Romani di Pirandello* (published in «L'Urbe» in January 1937), in which he describes Pirandello on his return from his stay on the Rhine: «Giungeva a Roma dall'università di Bonn, laureato in letterature romanze, con in una tasca un quadernetto – Goethe –, e nell'altra un quadernetto – Heine –».³⁶ Then comes an important statement:

Quanto è diversa da quella di oggi la Roma da lui vista allora, quando nessuna irruzione d'automobili impediva a lui di passeggiare col nuovo amico [Ugo Fleres], per il Corso o per via Nazionale, leggendo e limando i versi

³³ Faustini, *Luigi e Jenny*, cit., p. 303: «Over the last few months I have also been translating Goethe's *Roman Elegies* from German into Italian and the translation is to be published shortly».

³⁴ For further information about dating Pirandello's translation, see the paragraph *Un'ipotesi di datazione* in Fumi, «*Senza l'amore non saria mondo il mondo*», cit., pp. 13-17.

³⁵ Pirandello, *Saggi, poesie*, cit., p. 1286.

³⁶ Ugo Fleres, *Ricordi romani di Pirandello*, «L'Urbe», January 1937, pp. 20-23; 20. Heine was the most popular German author in Italy in the period between Carducci and World War I.

delle prime liriche umoristiche e della traduzione delle *Elegie Romane*, i quali si andavano accumulando in quei tali quadernetti.³⁷

There is no doubt, therefore, that Pirandello completed his translations in Rome, even if it seems likely that he had begun it in Bonn (if we are to believe Fleres, who describes Pirandello coming back from Germany with ‘one– Goethe –notebook’ in one pocket). In the autobiographical preface that Pirandello included in his *Vieille Sicile*, he stated that he had in fact brought his favourite author Goethe with him, contradicting those who suggested that it was rather Heine: «De Bonn je suis revenu à Rome, mais je n'en ai pas rapporté Heine, comme on se plaît à le dire, j'en ai rapporté Goethe dont j'ai traduit les *Elégies romaines*».³⁸

According to Luigi Forte, in the *Taccuino di Bonn* you can detect «cadenze nate con ogni probabilità da letture goethiane».³⁹ There is no denying that Pirandello already nurtured a great interest in Goethe during his time in Bonn and considered his work as a cultural benchmark: this is testified, for example, by the accuracy with which Pirandello recorded the date of his visit to Goethe's house in Frankfurt in that same *Taccuino*, almost as if it were the date of a personal pilgrimage: «13 giugno 1890 – Visitata la casa di Goethe, in Francoforte».⁴⁰ In addition, his *Elegie renane*, composed during the Bonn years, were clearly inspired by Goethe's *Roman Elegies*. As has been demonstrated, however, Lo Vecchio-Musti's time frame, which places the translation of the *Roman Elegies* between 1889 and 1890,⁴¹ right in the middle of the Bonn years, has to be discounted. On this subject, read also Pirandello in his *Autobiographical Letter* in which he reports: «Scrissi in Germania, invece, *Pasqua di Gea*, che è un poemetto primaverile in lasse

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Luigi Pirandello, *Carnet de l'auteur. Biographie*, in *Vieille Sicile*, transl. by Benjamin Crémieux, [Paris], Gallimard, 1928, p. 4.

³⁹ Luigi Forte, *Elegie a confronto. La lezione di W. Goethe nel giovane Pirandello*, in *Pirandello e la Germania*, Atti del convegno del Centro Nazionale di Studi Pirandelliani di Agrigento, ed. by Gilda Pennica, Palermo, Palumbo, 1984, pp. 45-56: 49.

⁴⁰ Pirandello, *Saggi, poesie*, cit., p. 1234.

⁴¹ *Bibliografia di Pirandello*, ed. by Manlio Lo Vecchio-Musti, Milano, Mondadori, 1952, p. 35.

rimate di settenarii, per nulla umoristico, e le *Elegie renane*:⁴² no mention of the Goethean translation having been written in Bonn.

In the light of such considerations, we can reasonably state that, although Pirandello probably started to translate Goethe's *Elegies* in Bonn, he certainly completed the project after his return from Bonn, between the second half of April, date of his return to Rome, and 17 October 1891, the date of his letter to Jenny indicating that the translation had already been completed (in the November letter Pirandello states that he had already received the first proofs from the printer).

According to Ugo Fleres, Pirandello worked on this translation in «quadernetti», but, unfortunately, to date these notebooks have never been found. The publication of one elegy (specifically, the 7th) or, more frequently, of groups of couplets taken from the collection in articles and reviews in journals, before and after the 1896 Giusti edition, testifies to the existence of variants compared to the version that became part of the *princeps*.⁴³ The existence of these variants shows that Pirandello continued to work on the text of the *Elegies*: it is highly likely, therefore, that he did not finish his work *definitively* in 1891 but anyway returned to the texts up until 1896 and even beyond their publication (1902).⁴⁴ It is reasonable to suppose, however, that the translation was completed in 1891 (not, therefore, including 1892, as Aletta suggests – but does not justify),⁴⁵ also

⁴² Pirandello, *Lettera autobiografica*, in *Saggi, poesie*, cit., p. 1286.

⁴³ I have found variants in the couplets contained in the following articles: [Elegy VII], «Rassegna settimanale universale», year I, n. 1, 5 January 1896, p. 5; Leo Fergus [Ugo Fleres], *I palazzi romani*, «La Critica», year III, n. 2, 9 April 1896, pp. 332-339: 333; Tommaso Gnoli, *Nuova versione dell'Elegie Romane*, «Rassegna settimanale universale», 26 April 1896, pp. 9-10; Luigi Pirandello, *Le Elegie Romane del Goethe*, «Capitan Fracassa», year II, n. 30, 31 January 1902, pp. [1-2]. For the variants contained in articles not signed by Pirandello but by his close friends, we can suppose that they may have had a version of the text given to them by Pirandello himself.

⁴⁴ This is true despite Pirandello having stated, in the letter dated 15 November 1894, that the publisher Giusti of Livorno had agreed to publish the *Roman Elegies* «dopo tre anni che mi dormivano sotto la polvere, sullo scrittojo!» (Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., p. 209): it is reasonable to suppose that every now and then Pirandello had dusted them off.

⁴⁵ Alessio Aletta, (*Metrical*) *form as the soul of poetry: the translation of Goethe's Römische Elegien by Luigi Pirandello*, «Pirandello Studies», n. 38, 2018, pp. 66-79: 67.

considering the nature of the variants: they exist, but are small or negligible, and mostly concern punctuation.

Features of the edition. Role of Ugo Fleres 'translator'

Pirandello's translation came on top of previous Italian translations of the *Roman Elegies*,⁴⁶ compared to which it stood out for his choice of meter. Pirandello's version is, in fact, characterized by his desire to closely reflect Goethe's meter, the elegiac couplet. It was Pirandello's talent in refining this meter that determined the success that his translation enjoyed with his contemporaries. This is clear, on the one hand, from the acclaim it received from the critics, and on the other, from the fact that there were no further translations of Goethe's collection into Italian until 1911, when the version by Giuseppe Caprino (Milano, Sonzogno) was published. In the years leading up to Pirandello's translation, on the other hand, translations of the collection had been published at closer intervals.

According to Giusti of Livorno, the 1896 edition of the translated and illustrated *Roman Elegies* consists of 92 pages (19 × 12.5 cm), presents a portrait of Goethe, the frontispiece, a sonnet by Pirandello dedicated to Ugo Fleres and the Italian text of the twenty *Elegies*. The elegies are presented only in the Italian version, without notes. The cover shows a bust of Goethe and some botanical embellishments, the title is red, the other editorial notes are black (see *Iconographic Appendix*, fig. 1); in the back cover there is the image of a boat, in black and white (see fig. 2). The edition, which Pirandello considered «veramente splendida»,⁴⁷ is accompanied by twenty illustrations by Ugo Fleres (who signed them with the initials V.T.), in shades of gray: twelve depicting female heads or busts, four heads or busts of classical statues, three botanical elements and a portrait of Goethe as a young man (see figg. 3-8).

Fewer than thirty copies of the *edito princeps* are known to have survived to this day, currently preserved in libraries in Italy, plus just a few still available in the antiques market. When analysing certain copies of the *Roman Elegies* translated by Pirandello, in the 1896 Giusti edition, I noticed that there are two distinct types of specimens in circulation today. These are identical in every way, except for the paper. One is heavier and of finer

⁴⁶ Fumi, «*Senza l'amore non saria mondo il mondo*», cit., pp. 34-38.

⁴⁷ Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., p. 286.

quality than the other, which made the second specimen more prone to yellowing and damage. These are not two distinct editions, it is more likely that in 1896 Giusti made two printing runs of the book: a single edition on two qualities of paper. Unfortunately we cannot say at the moment whether these two runs were done at the same time or one after the other, to satisfy the demand for the successful translation of the work.

The twenty illustrations specially executed by Fleres for Goethe's *Elegies* indicate that the artist was closely involved in completing the project. Unlike the translation, which met with unanimous acclaim from the critics, the illustrations provoked contrasting opinions. If in his article presenting the collection, published in 1896, Tomaso Gnoli failed to express his opinion of Fleres's illustrations, limiting himself to a neutral presentation,⁴⁸ he later spoke out more explicitly when he declared them to be «brutte».⁴⁹ In the review published on 15 June 1896 in the pages of «La Cultura», signed with the initial R. (perhaps indicating Ruggiero Bonghi) the reviewer writes that «Il libro è illustrato artisticamente da Ugo Fleres; e basti il nome, che non ha d'uopo di lodi, per intender quanto valga quella illustrazione e con quanta maestria l'arte figurativa sia messa in armonia con la poetica».⁵⁰ Luigi Parpagliolo thought differently, concluding his article on the collection just published, which appeared in «Fanfulla della Domenica», XVIII, 1896, n. 23, by defining the volume «elegantissimo», but underlining that Fleres's depictions of female heads «non avevano a che fare con le *Elegie*». In spite of this the illustrations were praised as having «un segreto significato nell'affermazione dell'eterno femminino, che dominò sempre l'anima di Goethe».⁵¹

What is certain is that Pirandello was particularly keen on having an edition illustrated by Fleres, as emerges from passages of the letters to his

⁴⁸ He in fact writes: «Ora Luigi Pirandello, allo scopo di serbare intero il carattere dell'opera di Volfrango Goethe, ci dà le venti *Elegie* tradotte in distici e illustrate con un ritratto di Volfrango e con dei tipi di donne nei quali rivivono le foggie del vestire e le acconciature di quei tempi» (Gnoli, *Nuova versione*, cit., p. 9).

⁴⁹ Tommaso Gnoli, *Un cenacolo letterario: Fleres, Pirandello & C.*, «Leonardo», year VI, March 1935, pp. 103-107: 105.

⁵⁰ «La Cultura», year XV, n. 4, 15 June 1896, p. 95.

⁵¹ Luigi Parpagliolo, *Elegie romane*, «Fanfulla della Domenica», year XVIII, n. 23, 7 June 1896, pp. 2-3: 3.

family⁵² in which, when referring to his translation of the *Elegies*, he almost always mentions his friend as well, as if to underline the fact that his contribution was not merely an accessory, but an important part of his edition.

Pirandello and Ugo Fleres established a strong, lasting and fruitful friendship.⁵³ On his return from Bonn, Pirandello took an active part in Rome's cultural scene, joining the literary circle started by Fleres, along with Giuseppe Mantica, Tomaso Gnoli and Ettore Romagnoli. The circle «avversava il dannunzianesimo trionfante, e chiedeva un'arte sincera e una poesia viva»;⁵⁴ their meetings were mostly dedicated to reading and to discussing what the members of the group were busy composing.⁵⁵

Luigi Pirandello [...] giungeva a Roma dall'università di Bonn [...] con in una tasca un quadernetto – Goethe –, e nell'altra un quadernetto – Heine –. Tra baule e valigia egli li mostrò subito a un giovane scrittore [Ugo Fleres] che gli veniva presentato dall'uomo più tranquillamente bizzarro del mondo, il suo compaesano Millefiori, filosofo e scultore.⁵⁶

Starting from this memory of Ugo Fleres it is easy to imagine a young Pirandello who, just back from Germany and full of enthusiasm, showed his new collection of the *Roman Elegies* to his new friend. Elio Providenti cautiously suggests that it may have been Fleres who promoted the idea of translating Goethe to Pirandello, and he bases himself on this hypothesis

⁵² Consider the letters dated February 1892, February 1893, 15 November 1894, 18 April, 2 June, 10 November, 20 December 1895 and an undated letter that Providenti placed among those written in 1891, in which Pirandello declares that his translation is illustrated «splendidamente» by Fleres (Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., pp. 94, 133, 209, 243, 247, 277, 286, 289).

⁵³ On the friendship between them see also the article by Francesca Tomassini, *Gl'inseparabili: Pirandello e Fleres tra scrittura e pittura*, in *La letteratura e le arti*, Atti del XX Congresso dell'ADI – Associazione degli Italianisti, Napoli 7-10 settembre 2016, a cura di Lorenzo Battistini et alii, Roma, Adi editore, 2018 (http://www.italianisti.it/Atti-di-Congresso?pg=cms&text=p&cms_codsec=14&cms_codcms=1039).

⁵⁴ Benedetto Croce, *La letteratura della Nuova Italia*, Bari, Laterza, 1950, 6 voll., vol. VI, p. 145. On the concept of *sincerismo* see Providenti, *Gli anni della formazione*, in Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., pp. 25-55.

⁵⁵ On Fleres's cultural circle see Gnoli, *Un cenacolo letterario*, cit.

⁵⁶ Fleres, *Ricordi romani*, cit., p. 20.

to state that Pirandello cannot have translated the *Elegies* in Bonn,⁵⁷ but there are insufficient elements to support such an idea.

It is moving to read the passages portraying certain private moments of their intense friendship:

Ed eccoli [Pirandello e Ugo Fleres] in visita alla taverna delle *Elegie*,⁵⁸ dove il Goethe aveva scandito i distici sull'agile schiena di Faustina.⁵⁹ Niente pericolo s'inebriassero del vino cantato dal Goethe i due che, da pretti siciliani, erano mezzo astemii. Del resto l'antica bettola era già mutata in latteria, Dioniso aveva ceduto il posto a Pan, e il ricordo goethiano serbavasi in una lunga lapide parietale [...]. Ma gironzolando da quelle parti, ove in piazza Montanara sorgeva cupo e quasi camuffato il teatro di Marcello, ora sgombro e splendido, Luigi Pirandello concludeva la sua bella traduzione che presto vide la luce, con certi fregi del compagno cicerone [il Fleres], il quale era, a modo suo pittore. Già, pittore; e gl'inseparabili, muniti di scatola da colori, se ne andavano fuori città a dipingere certi tramonti che forse ai nostri giorni non mancherebbero di fortuna.⁶⁰

Pirandello pays an important tribute to his friend, acknowledging his role in completing the edition: he inserts an 'autobiographical' sonnet composed for, and dedicated to, his friend, which becomes a sort of preface to reading the *Elegies*. In this sonnet Pirandello pays homage to Goethe and to Rome, publicly declaring his own affinity with the great German poet, with whom he also shared a love of classical Rome; in addition he openly declares that by translating the *Elegies*, he made Goethe's voice his own. The sonnet is thus all the more important and worthy of consideration and prominence, since it becomes the literary expedient by which Pirandello *takes possession* of the anthology, revealing his intention to declare himself not just a simple translator but a poet:

⁵⁷ Pirandello, *Lettere della formazione*, cit., p. 89 nota.

⁵⁸ Reference to the Elegy XV, set in a Roman tavern: perhaps the Osteria alla Campagna, in vicolo di Monte Savello.

⁵⁹ This is a quotation from Elegy V, 15-16: «E spesso a lei scandito con agile man su le terga / ho l'esametro, e spesso ho in braccio a lei rimato» (Pirandello's translation in Fumi, «Senza l'amore non saria mondo il mondo», cit., p. 71).

⁶⁰ Fleres, *Ricordi romani*, cit., p. 21.

Quando a la boreal nebbia che stese,
lunga stagion, sui miei più caldi amori
sua grigia notte, ai nordici rigori
volsi le spalle, e alfin del mio paese

il chiaro ciel rividi e gli splendori,
nel sorriso d'April, diletto mese;
da la dolcezza che nel cor mi scese
sbocciâr gli affetti, come tanti fiori.

E Roma salutai con la possente
voce del Vate, che oblio più non teme,
teco volgendo l'Elegia ridente,

Ugo, e i nostri pensier con insueta
corrispondenza rifletteano insieme
i giocondi fantasmi del Poeta.⁶¹

We can clearly deduce from this sonnet dedicated to Fleres that Pirandello wrote his translation in Rome. In it, in fact, he writes that, after having 'turned his back' on the gray northern world (i.e. after having left Bonn), which had laid 'its gray night' on his 'warmest loves', he returned finally and happily to Rome, in the 'delightful' month of April. His heart was bursting with sweetness, and he greeted Rome «con la possente / voce del Vate, che oblio più non teme». The «Vate» is Goethe, whose voice has survived in time and is no longer afraid of being forgotten: Pirandello greeted Rome through the voice of Goethe precisely by translating his *Roman Elegies*. The concluding verses, moreover, show that this happened thanks to the collaboration of his friend Ugo Fleres, dedicatee of the sonnet: «teco volgendo l'Elegia ridente, // Ugo». What is concealed behind this «teco», what role did Fleres play in this translation?

We know for certain that Ugo Fleres produced the illustrations that accompanied the edition: I believe it is reasonable to sustain that Pirandello was referring solely to this type of collaboration on the part of his friend, therefore excluding any cooperation with the verbal translation. On the other hand, it is impossible to check through other sources whether Fleres

⁶¹ I quote the sonnet from the Fumi edition, cit., pp. 53-54.

effectively had a hand in turning the verses into Italian. Can the illustrator, Fleres, in turn be considered a translator? Did Pirandello really consider the job of illustrating a collection of poetry a form of 'translating'? To answer these questions positively it is worth considering the importance that Pirandello gave to the role of the illustrator (and thus to his friend's cooperation in producing the illustrations for his book) *as a translator*. In this sense, it is useful to refer to Pirandello's later reflections in his essay *Illustratori, attori e traduttori* (1908), which returned to and amplified content that he had already expressed in the articles *Nell'arte e nella vita. Vignette e scene* («Il Momento», 1° June 1905) and *L'azione parlata* (1899):

Illustratori, attori e traduttori si trovano difatti, a ben considerare, nella medesima condizione di fronte all'estimativa estetica.

Tutti e tre hanno davanti a sé un'opera d'arte già espressa, cioè già concepita ed eseguita da altri, che l'uno deve tradurre in un'altra arte; il secondo, in azione materiale; il terzo, in un'altra lingua.⁶²

In those pages Pirandello unites the figures of the illustrator and the translator, because they are both involved in the difficult task of 'translating': the former with drawing and coloring implements, the latter with words. According to Pirandello's theory, retrospectively we can appreciate that he considered the job of illustrating a book more than just a supplementary contribution but rather a real 'form of translation': the translated text and the illustrations combine to convey a dialogue, all the more profound since both the illustrator and the translator are aware of their 'secondary' role compared to that of the poet himself. The Giusti edition of Goethe's *Roman Elegies* can thus be seen as the work that 'seals' a friendship. It was also a linguistic challenge, consisting of the attempt to render the rhythm of the German couplets and Goethe lines about his love for classical Rome in Italian, with words that Pirandello deliberately and successfully made his own. The edition, published at last after prolonged trials and tribulations, even now manages to reveal its fascination to those who have the pleasure of holding it in their hands.

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⁶² Pirandello, *Saggi, poesie*, cit., p. 217.

Iconographic Appendix



Fig. 1. Cover



Fig. 2. Back cover

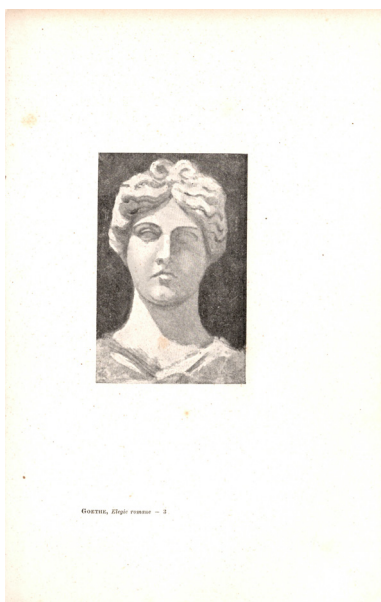


Fig. 3. Classical female statue (after Elegy II).



Fig. 4. Portrait of a young woman (after Elegy V).



Fig. 5. Portrait of a young woman (after Elegy VIII).

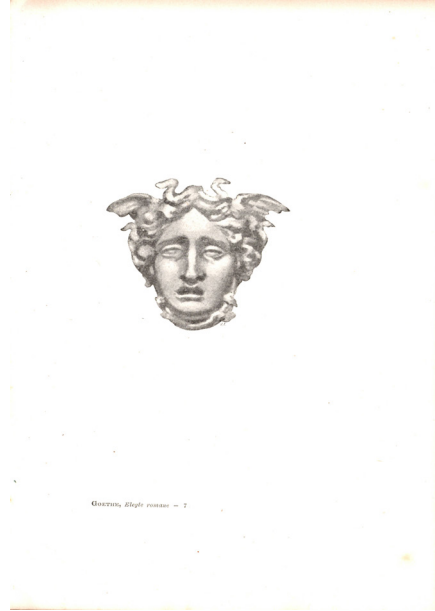


Fig. 6. Head of a classical statue (after Elegy X).



Fig. 7. Botanical illustration (after Elegy XVIII).

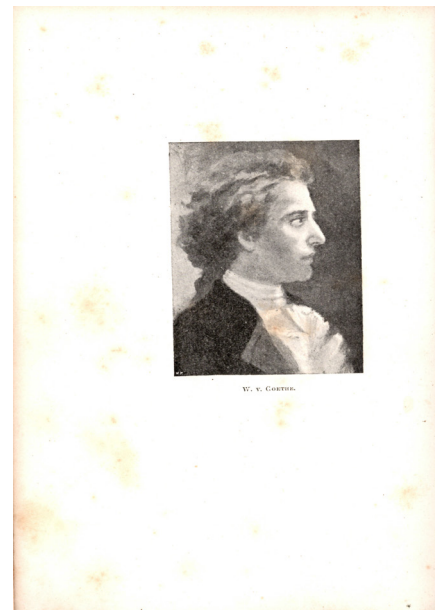


Fig. 8. Portrait of Goethe as a young man (before the frontispiece).

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